

Slaves who Make their Savior Beautiful and the Gospel Believable ~ Titus 2:9-10

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on August 10, 2008

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Teachers Rules from Old Town Sacramento Schoolhouse for the year 1872:

- Men teachers may take one evening each week for courting purposes, or two evenings a week if they go to church regularly
- After ten hours in school, the teachers may spend the remaining time reading the Bible or other good books
- Women teachers who marry [will be dismissed, and any who] engage in unseemly conduct will be dismissed
- Any teacher who smokes, uses liquor in any form, frequents pool or public halls, or gets shaved in a barber shop will give good reason to suspect his worth, intention, integrity, and honesty

Here are the Rules for Teachers in 1915 (Cabell County West Virginia Board of Education):

- You will not marry during the term of your contract
- You are not to keep company with men
- You must be home between the hours of 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. unless attending a school function
- You may not loiter downtown in ice cream stores
- You may not travel beyond the city limits unless you have the permission of the chairman of the board
- You may not ride in a carriage or automobile with any man unless he is your father or brother
- You must wear at least two petticoats
- Your dresses must not be any shorter than two inches above the ankle

It's interesting how much things have changed. But as we look at Titus 2 again today, while societies change and and while there are some cultural connotations that may differ and vary depending on time and place, a scriptural truth never changes and always applies.

Our conduct and how we carry ourselves before others reflects on what or who we represent. You may disagree with some of the rules of a superior, you may think a standard unfair or unnecessary, but all your opinions and complaints don't change the reality that *who you work for* and *how you work for them* (in submission with a cheerful heart rather than grumbling) is very important to God.

I can guarantee you that you have less to grumble about at work than the group we'll see addressed today – slaves in bonds to masters who didn't have just labor laws in their society, or love in their heart for them. Ultimately you're representing something much more critical than any earthly organization, you work for a much higher Master and reality, and how you live your everyday life (whether inside or outside your workplace or home) either reflects God and the gospel or it rejects God and the gospel practically.

Titus 2:4 calls women to “encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children,⁵ to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, **so that the word of God will not be dishonored.**

⁶ Likewise urge the young men to be sensible; ⁷ in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, *with* purity in doctrine, dignified, ⁸ sound *in* speech which is **beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.** ⁹ Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, ¹⁰ not pilfering, but showing all good faith **so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.** ¹¹ For the **grace of God** has appeared, bringing **salvation** to all men

This is a God-centered, gospel-motivated, grace-empowered plea: Something much more important than your sense of fulfillment in your life and work is at stake here, and Titus 2 tells us it is the glory of God, the honor of Christ and His Word, the beauty of our Savior and believability of the transforming grace of the gospel!

We have been studying through this wonderful *little* book to Titus that has *big* truths. Originally this book was written to Titus for the churches on the island of Crete, a colony of the Roman Empire in the Mediterranean Sea. As the letter would be read by Titus in the churches there would be Christian slaves in the room, many of whom had non-Christian masters. God's Word in Titus 2 has something to say about the vital role of all His people, of every status and sex and stage of life as we've seen in past weeks (male and female, young and old) including those in bonds who may have been very low in the eyes of the pagan world, but who had a very high calling and role in the eyes of the Most High God who they ultimately serve.

Titus 2:9-14 (NASB95) ⁹ Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, ¹⁰ not pilfering, but showing all good faith **so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.** ¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to **all men [all classes of men, including slaves and even wicked slave-traders],** ¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, ¹⁴ **who gave Himself for us to redeem us** from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself **a people for His own possession** [NKJV "his own special people"], zealous for good deeds.

Slaves may not have had a promise of earthly redemption from slavery or earthly deliverance or emancipation, but they were well familiar with it (hoped for it), understood the *spiritual* redemption of v. 14 well. They may not have been a special people group in the eyes of the Greco-Roman world, but they were in the eyes of God. They may not have had a good human master, but they had an unspeakably glorious and loving Heavenly Master, Jesus Christ.

And this passage calls on them despite their difficult and degraded and discouraging circumstance in life, to glorify God and His gospel by how they lived and served. And if God's grace was sufficient for them to do that, it is sufficient for us as well! In fact, God's amazing grace is the *only* explanation for how this passage could be possible for slaves in the Roman Empire and that is the whole point that should be seen by a watching world.

I've often heard well-meaning preachers read the passages addressing slaves in the NT and they'll say "just substitute the word *employee* instead of slave and *employer* instead of master" – but let's not be so quick to do that lest we miss the full import and impact God intended. We want to be careful to keep interpretation and application in order.

I can understand why it's easier to jump over this uncomfortable subject and instead just view it through the lenses of our more comfortable modern society, and of course God's Word here has *application* to our labor force structure in America, by extension.

But we need to first understand, as always, not *what does this mean to me*, but what did this mean originally when God inspired it through the original author to the original audience and setting. As we do that, we will see in even greater light how immensely relevant and revolutionary and powerful God intended verse 9-10 to be both then and now.

Verse 9 does not begin with “employees” or “volunteers” and it doesn’t even use “servants” (this is not any of the six different Greek words that lexicons say can be translated “servants”). This is the plural of the Greek word *doulos*, which all the best sources unanimously say *doulos* refers to a slave. If you weren’t here in April 13 of this year when I taught on “slaves” you really need to get that CD or listen or [read online](#), because that may be one of the most important messages I’ve ever understood in life.

Of the groups Paul addresses in Titus 2, slaves may have been the largest. If you can try and imagine this auditorium is a large house church on Crete, at least one out of every three of us in this room would be slaves. Statistically that’s how many cities were. In some parts of Asia Minor, slaves and ex-slaves outnumbered free men.

Is the Bible teaching slavery is good and ok?

- Paul is not arguing for the virtue or goodness of slavery as an institution by any means here; God is teaching us the virtue of glorifying Him by living grace-filled lives even in institutions that are not good, or by submission to ungodly authorities (Christians are also to submit to husbands who may not be good or to bad governments)
- Paul does not condone or command or commend human slavery, and he didn’t own slaves himself
- In 1 Corinthians 7 he says if you have a choice not to put yourself in bondage to another, and if you have the opportunity to become free, take it by all means
- In 1 Timothy 1:10 Paul lists kidnapping for slavery as one of the sins that is practiced by the ungodly
- God did sometimes allow conquered nations in the O.T. to be slaves as a judgment on their sin, but they were not to be treated as pagans did. Slaves were freed on year of Jubilee
- If a Jew was caught kidnapping or slave-trading, Exodus 21 imposes the death penalty
- If someone did have a slave and treated them very cruelly (ex: beat them to injury), OT law required them to be freed

The concern and care for slaves and aliens and foreigners and widows and women in need in Scripture is in stark contrast to the rest of the ancient world. God’s Word had hope for each group.

The fact that the Bible discusses slavery does not mean that God instituted it, ordained it, or approves of it – any more than its discussion of divorce which it also regulates though God hates it. The Bible recognizes that some human situations exist because of the hardness of sinful hearts, and what God does is provide principles for how we can glorify Him under any circumstance.

Slavery at that time was not the same as slavery in America:

- Not mainly agricultural (slaves might be physicians, barbers, administrators, tutors, etc.), not kept uneducated (many were intentionally educated), not skin-color-based
- many were freed either by good owners or by someone who would come and pay a ransom to redeem them, to buy back
- Sometimes their children could be granted citizenship which may have been true of Paul's parents (grandparents?)
- If you had a good master, it could be quite different than the slavery we think of, but there's no question that many slaves were severely mistreated and life could be miserable
- Legally and socially they were not on the same playing field with everyone else, they were at their master's mercy
- You can read horror stories of how cruel masters treated slaves in ancient times. Far better to be a day laborer, toiling in the sun up to 12 hours a day at least six days a week, than to be an unpaid slave with an evil master
- When you read v. 9, don't think of an employee who gets paid hourly for a 9-5 job and goes home on the weekends
- think of someone who has been paid for by someone else who is his owner and master and who every day of his life is now controlled by his master for better or worse
- A *doulos* did not negotiate his salary, there was no signing bonus or benefits in his contract, there was just bondage
- A *doulos* did not have much choice or rights or free will or hope for freedom or personal fulfillment or anything independent of the whim and will of his master or lord
- The master had legal power to do essentially anything he wanted to his slaves. You can read real-life examples of some who crucified their slaves for killing a household pet
- one had his slave eaten by animals for breaking a vase
- You can read Greek writers as famous as Aristotle on down who described slaves as being just a tool or instrument you own, hardly distinguishable from the animals you own
- A common view was that they were basically subhuman
- Not all masters or lords were so cruel or harsh, but many of them were, and it is to some of these that Titus 2:9 says:

⁹ **Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, ¹⁰ not pilfering, but showing all good faith**

*This is why it's important to understand the historical context: Paul is not giving this command of proper submission and work attitude to 21st century Americans sitting all day in a chair in an air-conditioned office.

He is talking to bond-slaves, some of whom may have been in working conditions and environments far worse than we could ever imagine, with masters that would make the worst of your bosses look nice in comparison. And Scripture tells **slaves** not to complain – *how dare we be complainers and discontent Americans?!*

The application – if Christians should and could glorify God by their attitude and service as slaves where they had pagan masters who mistreated them mercilessly – if these commands applied to them, how much more should we respond when we get to go home with our freedom at the end of each day? If overworked unpaid unappreciated people in bondage were to obey these principles, how much more those of us who get paid to work?

Without question and without exception, no matter how difficult your week was at work, or what project you're working on or who your dealing with or have problems with, or what's stressing you out, none of us can come close to what some of the original readers of this passage had to go through. It's not even in the same arena. But the same Word of God and same Spirit of God applies to both us and them – we have no excuse not to glorify God in our work.

So God inspired Paul to write this passage giving slaves (and us) **FIVE WAYS TO GLORIFY GOD IN YOUR WORK.**

#1 – Be Submissive

⁹ *Urge* bondslaves **to be subject to their own masters in everything,**

The verb for urging is actually carried over from v. 6. Submission must be exhorted. This is the same expression in verse 5 where wives are to be submissive to or subject to their own husbands.

This same expression is used in Titus 3:1 where it says we are “to be subject to rulers, to authorities” (ex: government). The Greek word appears some 40 times where the KJV elsewhere translates it as “subdue” or “subject” or “submit / submissive” or “put under” every time except for Titus 2 and one other place where they translate it as “obedient” for some reason.

But the word is broader than and different than the other Greek word translated “obey” in the next phrase of Titus 3:1 – the word for obey is more a subset of and flows out of submission. In fact it's possible to obey technically yet be un-submissive in attitude.

William Hendriksen writes (*NTC*, p. 369): ‘External compliance with the will of the master is not enough, however. Growling and grumbling underneath are also forbidden. The sullen disposition has never yet won a soul for Christ.’

In ancient Greek literature the word “submit” included the ‘keeping to one’s position and developing attitudes of humility [as Aristotle used it], respect and love towards’ (Marshall, *ICC*, 259)

Literally what's commanded here is a present-tense continual placing of yourself under the authority of who you work for in both actions and attitudes. As other scriptures say, its:

- not only when they master's there but when they're not
- not only for good bosses or masters, but those who are not
- not only when you agree with the orders, but *especially* true submission of action and attitude is shown when you disagree but submit anyways (or esp. with ungodly boss)

#2 – Be Well-Pleasing

⁹ ... be subject to their own masters in everything, **to be well-pleasing**

This phrase is used 8 other times in the NT, and everywhere else it refers to being pleasing to God or in the sight of God. In the familiar passage of Romans 12:1-2, it says we are to be living sacrifices which are **acceptable or well-pleasing** to God, which is our reasonable or spiritual service of worship.

Philippians 4:18 uses the image of “a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, **well-pleasing to God**” – there should be such an aura in us before others as well that our work is well-pleasing and done with excellence as an act of worship (which it should be anyways).

Colossians 3:20 shows us that our desire to be pleasing to God is ultimately why we submit to and obey earthly authorities: “Children, **be obedient** to your parents in all things, **for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.**”

Hebrews 13:21 tells us we don’t do this in our own strength, but God is glorified when we rely on Him. It says he is the one who will “equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is **pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be the glory*** forever and ever. Amen.”

1 Peter 4:11 says it this way “whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is serving **by the strength which God supplies**; so that in all things **God may be glorified** through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

You see, it’s not just the lofty things in life that glorify God – it’s the little things, the lowly things in the eyes of the world that servants and slaves did, *if done through Christ by the strength which God supplies*. The primary vehicle for God’s glory is not our brief service on Sunday (although I certainly want to display the supremacy of God’s glory as best we can). How you serve and submit and seek to please through your work during the week is how God will be glorified much farther than I ever can.

Nothing is too menial or mundane – as Paul says elsewhere “**in all things, whether you eat or drink, do all to the glory of God.**”

#3 – Be Honoring, not Arguing

⁹ Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, **not argumentative**

Literally, don’t talk back or talk against (to the boss or behind his back). There’s a difference between discussing when it’s welcomed, and disputing, which usually has a dishonoring that goes along with it. In biblical submission, the most important issue is not whether you’re right or not in a disagreement with your boss; it’s whether your attitude is right according to God’s Word.

There may be occasions where your concern to honor your boss and organization compels you to graciously and humbly share some information your superior may not have in regards to the decision, but you aren’t always or habitually doing that or injecting your opinions or objecting, and you ultimately will submit.

The only biblically justified time not to obey is if authorities call us to disobey God - we obey God above man (ex: book of Acts, 4, 5).

But even on those very rare occasions that many of us will never be in, you can still honor authority in your respectful attitude:

- Paul once spoke disrespectfully to an ungodly Jewish authority one time, and asked forgiveness when he realized he was speaking to a leader in authority (high priest)
- David consistently honored King Saul who was as an ungodly authority – he wouldn't obey Saul into sin, but he did have a submissive heart and no ill will to his mean king
- Joseph did not follow the wishes of his master's wife into immorality but his heart even there was to honor his master and even more importantly his motivation was to not sin against his Heavenly Master. He was willing to spend years in jail because of his submission to God's will
- Daniel gives us a great example of how God blessed his submissive respectful attitude toward his master / authority in a diplomatic and wise way without violating scriptural commands or convictions (study Daniel 1 further)

#4 – Be Content

¹⁰ **not pilfering ...**

This was a big problem in the days of slavery and you can understand how they might justify a little stealing as slaves who were not always treated fairly. Their rationale might go like this: “The master owes me much more than this, for he has taken away my freedom and he is robbing me of my strength and talents, all without adequate compensation. A little taking advantage of them is nothing like how they've taken advantage of me.” *God says no.*

And if he doesn't let mistreated slaves get away with trying to justify it, don't even try it in our day in America! Never take what's not yours, whether stealing supplies, or stealing time by not really working the full hours you're paid for on your time sheet, or stealing from the government, or keeping back what you owe, keeping back from God as Ananias and Sapphira did (same word), being dishonest or unscrupulous in any way with your resources.

Paul told Timothy “if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content” (1 Tim 6:8). Paul could be content even when he went without the basic of food, when he was hungry, as he wrote in Philippians 4 from prison. He says in even the worst of circumstance we can be content through Christ who gives strength.

Slaves were given food and covering and could be content – we have far more and are not content?! Anything beyond what a slave has is an extraordinary blessing and bonus we do not deserve and may be taken away at any time! We actually get paid to work!!

If we are compensated for food, what should be our motivation?

Ephesians 4:28 (NASB95) He who steals must steal no longer; but rather **he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with one who has need.**

If you weren't a slave in those days and you were actually able to earn money by working, God's call goes far beyond “don't steal – labor hard so you can have resources to share to those in need.”

If you have a job right now in this economy – praise God! If finances are tight, keep honoring God by being a man of integrity and God will bless you even if you’re not rich. And as you work hard, don’t just do it for yourself, but pray God will bless you so that you can share with someone in need in the body of Christ. The Christian’s bumper sticker should be T.G.I.M. (Monday) – thank God for Monday, another week to glorify Him. Which leads to our final point:

#5 – Be a Banner for the Gospel

¹⁰ not pilfering, but **showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.** ¹¹ For the **grace of God** has appeared, **bringing salvation**

Notice the motivation is not “be a good worker so you’ll get a raise or a new job.” Paul is talking to slaves, and he doesn’t say “be a good worker so that your master may set you free some day.”

Christianity does not take us out of this world and its problems, it changes us in the midst of them by the grace v. 11 speaks of. How could a slave live v. 9-10? If he knew the reality of v. 11-14.

The focus of the Bible is not how we can get out of circumstances we are in, the Bible’s message is that we can enjoy and honor God in the midst of any circumstance. He often doesn’t take us out of our trials, but His sufficient grace helps us through our difficulties.

The end of verse 10 says that those who obey this passage adorn the teaching of God our Savior, the doctrine of salvation by grace as the next verse explains. The most menial and manual labor if done by a Christian to the glory of Christ, this passage teaches is how even slaves (especially slaves) could make their Savior beautiful and the gospel believable.

In an article in Breakpoint entitled "Drawn to the Light - Why Muslims Convert to Christianity" Dr. Dudley Woodberry, professor of Islamic Studies, aware that throughout the world Muslims have been turning to Christ, was curious about the reasons why -- especially in countries where the cost of converting is so high. To find the answer, he created a detailed questionnaire. Over a 16-year period, some 750 Muslims from 30 countries filled it out -- and the results are eye-opening. The number one reason Muslim converts listed for their decision to follow Christ was the lifestyle of the Christians who worked and lived among them.

If God has convicted you of your unbiblical view of work today, confess your sin and commit to apply this message by His grace.

1. Be Submissive
2. Be Well-Pleasing
3. Be Honoring, not Arguing (or complaining)
4. Be Content
5. Be a Banner for the Gospel

If Jesus is not your Master this morning, I pray you will become His lowly servant and slave and call Him Lord. You’re already a slave of sin, but Jesus can emancipate you from the bondage you are in now and eternal punishment. Jesus is the way and truth and life, the only source of eternal life, the only way to heaven, and He alone holds the truth that can set you free to serve Him and others for the glory of God.